
David Cotterrell: museums and heritage live.com : War artists trip to Afghanistan

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War artists trip to Afghanistan at the heart of new exhibition

New work by contemporary artist David Cotterrell will be unveiled for the first time as part of a major temporary exhibition War and Medicine launching on 22 November at Wellcome Collection.

Commissioned by the Wellcome Trust and supported by the Ministry of Defence, this powerful work is a response to Cotterrell's profound experiences travelling to Afghanistan where he spent time with British soldiers observing and capturing their daily life.

Through film and photography David Cotterrell has captured the drama of being on the front line, in particular the extraordinary efforts of the armed forces' medical staff and the human stories behind them.

War and Medicine is a groundbreaking exhibition that will consider the continually evolving relationship between warfare and medicine, beginning with the disasters of the Crimean War in the 1850s, and continuing through to today's conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Central to the exhibition is the uncomfortable and sometimes paradoxical relationship between war and medicine and the question of their influence upon each other. War and Medicine will show how humankind's desire to repair and heal is perpetually striving to keep pace with our capacity to maim and kill.

David Cotterrell spent one month in Camp Bastion in the Helmand Province last year, his trip having been inspired by the realisation that he is part of the last generation to have living relatives who experienced the Second World War.

Cotterrell explains: Growing up I can recall in-depth conversations with my grandfather about his own memories of war, and I feel fortunate to have been born into a generation that was not required to join the military. My experiences of life will always be moderate compared to this, and I have often wondered how people who have experienced war have managed to adjust to life after conflict.

Cotterrell's resulting artwork is two film-based pieces which will immerse visitors to the exhibition in the realities of contemporary battlefield medicine:

Theatre is a five-screen panoramic video projection that lasts 60 minutes in which Cotterrell attempts to contextualise his experience of witnessing the treatment of combat victims in Camp Bastion, Afghanistan. The film offers visitors to the exhibition with a rare glimpse of what is hidden from the public eye.

9-Liner is a three-screen video projection lasting 25 minutes, which explores the dislocation between the parallel experiences of casualties within theatre. It is a quiet study of a dramatic event: the attempt to bring those injured to the tented entrance of the desert field hospital.

David Cotterrell's diary written during his time in Camp Bastion is incredibly moving, and sometimes troubling, documentation of what he witnessed in Afghanistan as well as his personal struggle to come to terms with his role as an 'official war artist'. His work reveals not only the way medicine is administered in combat situations, but also the all too human stories that lie beneath

the casualty statistics.

Extracts from his diary will be published as part of War and Medicine the book, by Black Dog Publishing Ltd on 18 November 2008.

David Cotterrell will be in conversation with curator and writer Angela Weight on Saturday 7 February at a free event in Wellcome Collection.

Author not known



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